RESPONSE OF THE

GOVERNMENT OF MANITOBA

AND THE

COUNCIL ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

TO THE

REVIEW OF THE MANITOBA

COUNCIL ON POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

MARCH 2003

INTRODUCTION

The final report of the Review of the Manitoba Council on Post-Secondary Education was presented by Dr. John Mallea to the Minister of Advanced Education and Training and to the Council in late 2002. The Report reflects Government's belief that the post-secondary system in Manitoba is best coordinated by a body that serves at arm's length from government, thereby helping to ensure the strength and independence of colleges and universities in Manitoba.

Policy direction for the post-secondary education system in Manitoba is a shared responsibility between the Government of Manitoba, which sets overall policy direction for public services and for overall budgeting, and the Council on Post-Secondary Education, the arm's length agency responsible for coordination and planning in the post-secondary system. Both Government and the Council acknowledge the need to ensure that there is a balance between the autonomy of the colleges and universities and the need to ensure that public priorities are reflected in all spheres of public life, including post-secondary education.

Accordingly, Government and the Council have developed a joint response to the Review. Both the Government and the Council believe that the Review provides timely and useful information to ensure continued progress toward a comprehensive system of post-secondary education in Manitoba.

Government reaffirms its commitment to the Council on Post-Secondary Education as the primary external governance body for the system, and joins with stakeholder groups in its belief in the value added by the Council to the post-secondary system.

The Review presented 21 separate recommendations suggesting broad areas where Council should focus its energies in the future. These areas include Council's relationship with government; transparency; inclusiveness in Council's decision-making; the research and policy development function of Council; and public awareness about post-secondary education.

It is within these broad conceptual areas that both Government and Council can continue to chart a path for post-secondary education into the future. Both Government and Council note that there is a high degree of interrelationship between the various recommendations. Action in one area will necessarily have an impact on other areas.

AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

Council's Relationship with Government
A Two Way Relationship ⟷

A number of the Review's recommendations relate to the relationship between Government and Council. These recommendations speak to the need for Council to maintain independence in its functions while, at the same time, being responsive to public priorities set by Government. The Review states that clarification of the working relationship between Government and Council will help to reinforce this balance.

> The Review recommended that...
>
> the Minister and the government routinely seek the advice of COPSE on all matters of public policy affecting the province's system of PSE.
>
> the reporting relationships between COPSE, the Minister and the government be clarified.
>
> the operations of CEI be fully integrated into the administrative structure of the COPSE Secretariat.

Government regularly consults with the Council on matters related to post-secondary education, including tuition, system expansion and other initiatives. Government will continue to ensure that all major issues are brought forward. Government acknowledges that its relationship with the Council is not always understood by the public with regard to responsibilities for reporting and to Council's role in advising government on matters related to post-secondary education.

Action: *Government will consider whether further clarification of roles/responsibilities is required regarding the relationship between Council and government.*

Government notes that some clarification of the roles and mandates of the Council and the Colleges Expansion Initiative would be valuable. CEI is an important initiative of Government, and as such, merits a higher profile. Currently, however, Council does approve the allocation of all CEI funds among the colleges, and thus provides funding approval for CEI allocations, while the administration of the initiative is separated from the functions of Council's Secretariat.

As the initial four-year commitment to expand college enrolment comes to an end, it may be appropriate that Government revisit the issue of the separation of the CEI administration from the Council Secretariat.

Action: *Government will review the working relationship between CEI and the Council.*

Transparency

Much of the review spoke about the need for openness in the planning function of Council, with a particular focus on the process used and the seeming inadequacy of consultation and transparency in the development of plans.

The Review recommended that...

Council clarify its role, within the framework provided by the Minister, in the establishment of priorities for the PSE system as a whole.

COPSE develop a statement of its vision, program and agenda for the development of the PSE system over the next five years of its mandate and circulate it widely.

Council's priorities for PSE be clearly stated and distributed widely.

job descriptions for the Chair, Vice-Chair and members of COPSE be prepared along with orientation procedures and materials for new members.

the Secretariat produce and distribute a user-friendly handbook describing the functions of COPSE and its activities

Council consider ways of providing appropriate feedback to PSE institutions on their Estimates submissions.

the annual Estimates submissions of individual colleges and universities be circulated for information among all PSE institutions.

Council has engaged in strategic planning in each year of its operations, including the development of an annual operating plan. However, those plans were developed by Council to guide its own activity and not the joint activity of the post-secondary system.

Action: *Council will develop, in consultation with students, colleges and universities, a strategic planning process for post-secondary education in Manitoba.*

The Review identified the need to increase the Council's transparency of process. Council is in agreement that its operations and activities must be open. Improved openness and accountability require that the operations of Council, including procedures and policies, be clear and readily available to those seeking to understand the governance of Manitoba's post-secondary system.

Action: *Council will develop a policies and procedures manual that includes plain language explanations of activities and functions, as well as descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of the Chair, Vice-Chair and other members of Council. This will be made readily available to the public and posted on the Council's website.*

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Increased Consultativeness of Council

Public post-secondary education is a complex undertaking that involves tens of thousands of Manitobans as students, parents, faculty and staff, and touches many more, such as employers and labour groups. The impact of post-secondary education is felt widely and requires a broad range of ideas and perspectives to ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of our society.

The Review recommended that...

selection criteria be developed, and a nominations process introduced, to help in the identification and subsequent appointment of future members of Council.

high priority be given to improving COPSE's consultation process with stakeholder groups and that the Secretariat prepare and present to Council a strategy paper outlining how this improvement might best be achieved.

the issue of COPSE's internal committee structure be revisited and more inclusive mechanisms such as task forces encouraged.

The Report suggested the need for greater consultation in the selection of the membership of Council. However, it is government's responsibility under *The Council on Post-Secondary Education Act* to appoint members to public bodies. It is not expected that the process for Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council appointments will change.

Council staff continues to participate in projects in partnership with the post-secondary institutions. Examples include the 1999 Graduate Follow-up Survey, the Program Costing Methodology, and the current initiative to develop a set of indicators for the post-secondary system and several other projects currently underway or planned.

In November 2002, Council and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training hosted a forum on accessibility, including representation from students, colleges, universities and other groups. Yet, government and the Council recognize that there is a need to include stakeholders more often in key development activities.

Action: *Council will develop a strategy paper outlining methods for improving consultation with stakeholder groups.*

The Review pointed to the fact that Council makes all of its decisions in a committee of the whole (i.e. the entire Council considers all items). The Review stated that the lack of sub-committees limits the input that could be made on post-secondary issues.

Action: *Council will review its current internal organization and consider the creation of task groups to consider specific issues that could include external members drawn from among students, faculty, administration, business and labour.*

Policy Development and Research

The Review discussed separately the policy development role and the research role of Council. Government and the Council believe that the roles of research and policy development are intimately linked. Thus, recommendations relating to each are considered together.

The Review recommended that...

COPSE annually carry out or commission research on at least two issues of particular relevance to the Manitoba system of PSE.

Council raise its profile, become more proactive and place greater emphasis on matters of PSE policy.

COPSE serve as a catalyst for public education and debate on issues of post-secondary education among Manitobans.

Council build on its successful use of funding envelopes in promoting system restructuring and the introduction of new programs.

That Council create additional initiatives aimed at developing a greater articulation between and within colleges and universities.

Research helps to build public awareness of the value and importance of post-secondary education in Manitoba and is an essential component of policy development; if policy is to be relevant and effective, it must be grounded in research.

Action: *Council will, as part of its annual operating planning process, develop areas for applied research related to post-secondary policy issues facing the province.*

The Review also identified key areas where immediate action is warranted.

Action: *Council will consider expanding the use of envelopes to promote changes in the post-secondary system.*

Action: *Council will establish a process to facilitate greater articulation, including credit transfer, PLAR and other strategies, among post-secondary institutions.*

Public Awareness about Post-Secondary Education

The Review makes important recommendations about the level of public awareness regarding the Council itself and post-secondary education in general.

> The Review recommended that...
>
> the Secretariat's information and communications functions be strengthened by the appointment of a staff member with specific responsibilities in this area.
>
> the Minister prepare and deliver an annual presentation on "The Manitoban PSE System."
>
> the Chairperson of COPSE make an annual presentation to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council on the contribution of the PSE system to the economic development of the province.

Both Government and Council believe that actions outlined in other areas discussed above will help to increase the public profile of both the Council and the value of post-secondary education in Manitoba.

Post-secondary education is a crucial element in the economy of any knowledge-based society. It is important that key decision-makers be informed of the contribution of post-secondary education to the economic and social development of the province.

Action: *The Minister of Advanced Education and Training and the Chairperson of Council will offer to make presentations each year to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council and other such appropriate bodies on the current contribution of post-secondary education to the economic and social development of the province and its direction for the future.*

While both Government and Council agree that the appointment of dedicated staff in the area of communications is not feasible in today's financial environment, the functions of increased communication are important and valued. The creation of a communications plan will help Council and its staff to ensure that the profile of the Council and post-secondary education is heightened.

Action: *Council will develop a detailed communications plan.*

CONCLUSION

The 11 actions outlined in this Response will help to ensure that the post-secondary system continues to develop under the guidance of a strong, independent and inclusive Council. Government and Council believe that once implemented, these changes will ensure that Council can continue to plan and coordinate the development of a post-secondary system that promotes excellence and accessibility.